

Going to Work in the Family Business

By Amy Schuman, The Family Business Consulting Group, Inc.

So, you're ready to begin working in the family business. It's not the first time you've been paid by the business. You worked summers and vacations, but this is your first real full-time job after completing college and gaining experience elsewhere. Your goal is to work your way into the top management team, maybe even earning the title of President/CEO as your father (or mother) and grandfather before you.

You're eager to begin on the right foot. What should you consider as you set your course for success? Let's examine two very different scenarios to see what we can learn:

Atlas Map Company: A Great Model

Atlas Map Company is welcoming its first third-generation member onto its payroll. Shandra Foote has complied with the requirements of the family employment policy by completing both an undergraduate degree (in business) and three years employment at a local bank. Although her parents offered to find her a job after college, she chose to do it on her own. It took her a month to be hired by the local bank.

Since joining the bank, she's advanced through several levels and departments. Her first job, three months as a teller, was not too exciting. The tedium led her to consider quitting but her parents encouraged her to stick it out. Over time the bank recognized her abilities and she began to earn promotions, moving through several departments, including customer service and internal audit.

With three years of outside experience, Shandra approached the HR Manager at Atlas Map, expressing her desire to come to work in the family business. She provided an updated resume and cover letter, according

to the process outlined in the family employment policy. Hoping that a suitable position will be found in the next 12 months, Shandra checks in regularly with the HR Manager to discuss the process.

Atlas Map is looking forward to having Shandra join the team.

Shorewood Developments: A Troubling Case

Shorewood Developments also is on the brink of welcoming its first next-generation family employee. Stuart Shore has finished his finance degree and worked locally for a year. His parents arranged for him to get a sales position with the car dealership that provides Shorewood with all its vehicles. Stuart hoped to learn a lot about sales in this position, but he considers it boring and a waste of time. Everyone knows he's temporary, so he gets few customers. He can't get the quality customers of the regular salesmen and won't be around long enough to develop them. He finds it difficult to stay motivated and has missed quite a few days of work along the way.

Although the family employment policy at Shorewood Developments requires three years of outside work experience, Stuart has asked his parents to bend the policy just a bit. His time at the car dealership hasn't turned out as he hoped. What's the point in looking for another job? By the time he gets the swing of it, he'll be ready to move over to the family business. Even worse, if he gets a job he really likes he might never want to join the family business.

Stuart's parents have asked the HR Manager to create a job especially for him. Since no current opening fits Stuart's skills and experience, they're thinking of creating a special projects job that will largely entail

helping out where needed. The parents always have things they can't get to, so they plan to have their son fill in on those assorted tasks. They figure it will be a great way for Stuart to have a bird's eye view of the business. After all, Stuart finished his college degree and worked outside the business for a while. Why shouldn't the family business help him? As far as they're concerned, the sooner Stuart joins the family business, the better. The other employees, however, are less enthusiastic about the son of the boss joining the firm.

What can you/we learn from Shandra and Stuart?

- Follow your stated employment policies and resist the temptation to ask for them to be bent just this once.
- Find your own job before coming to the family business, even when your parents insist that they can find it for you.
- Remember that non-family employees are curious about you and are closely observing your actions. Even seemingly insignificant actions (like wearing cut-offs and a T-shirt when you visit the HR Manager or parking in the Customers Only parking place) will be discussed and remembered for years to come.

- Avoid a special projects job — begin your career in a real job close to the core workings of the company.
- Avoid working directly for your parents, begin your career with a well-respected manager who will give you honest feedback.
- When the job turns out to be boring, miserable or mindless — stick it out. It shows others (and yourself) that you fulfill your commitments and will help you develop real empathy and understanding for the majority of the working world.

Like all good stories, the beginning sets the stage for all future action. When you first come to work in the family business, there will be many temptations to cut corners and take advantage of the privileges of ownership. But beware although these actions may seem small and insignificant in the short run, they speak loudly regarding your overall orientation to your career. Will you be a family employee that consistently seeks special treatment and extra privileges, or a role model that leads by example? Your decisions regarding your first job in the family business will tell the tale.



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